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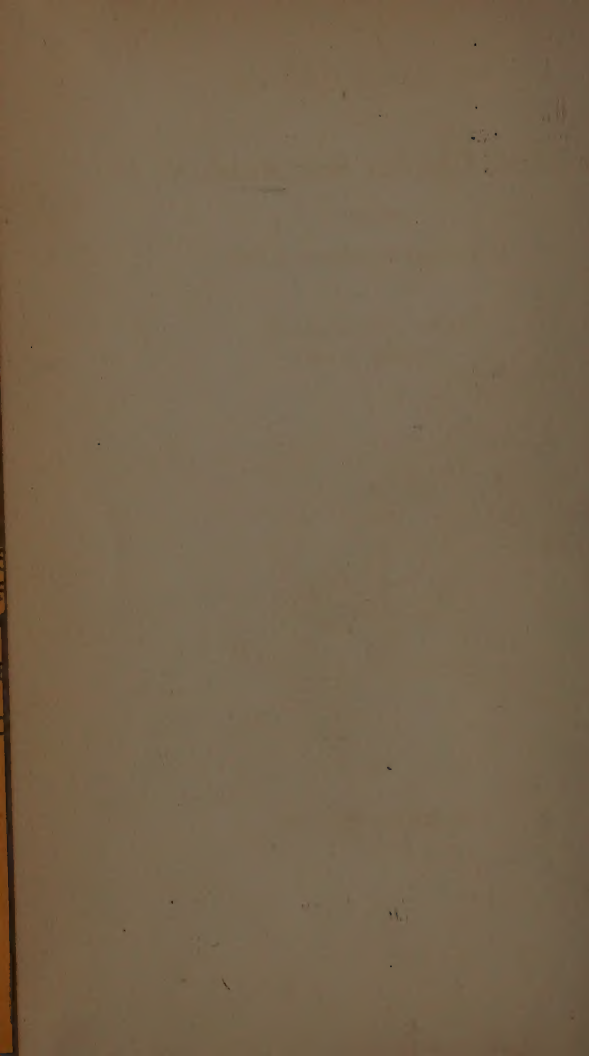
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Inaugural Address



Inaugural Address

by

President Charles Bert Reed, M. D.

before the

Chicago Literary Club

At the Annual Dinner

October 5, 1914



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THE members of the Literary Club stood about the ante-room discussing the paper they had just heard or looking for seats with as much dignity as men may whose hands are filled with sandwiches, saucers, sardines,

cigarettes, and other *sine qua nons*.

"What is all this talk about the Literary Club having lost its influence and function?" demanded the Poet, drawing a chair up to the round table, with the air of authority so easily acquired by foreign residence. "There is about as much reason in that statement as if it were said about the east

The writer has endeavored to give credit to authors quoted whenever it could be conveniently worked into the text. For the "Dentiad," and other suggestions from Bayard Taylor, it is desirable to make more specific acknowledgment. — C. B. R.

wind that whistles through the casements on a winter's eve and drives every one to Mrs. Green's tables for warmth and sustenance."

"The Club is all right," remarked the Doctor; "the round table especially fills a very definite and satisfactory place in my heart, and I am loth to have anything changed one iota so long as any two of us can meet for mutual delectation, and so long as a single idea remains that can be tossed about for further entertainment, or inverted or eviscerated for closer examination."

"Who started that pessimistic sentiment?" broke in the Historian, reaching for a bottle. "Surely in Chicago there is a demand for a club wherein the members can devote themselves to a discussion of pure literature. Besides, our mild potations and the fragrant wreaths of smoke soothe the mind and measurably delay the nervous, fidgety, hot-footed American hours. Moreover, this is not only a literary club but a club of authors—at least we become authors sooner or later—usually sooner under the stinging spur of the entertainment committee. Not authors, to be sure, of that crass mercantile variety who write the 'best sellers'—by no means; we write books to keep."

"I had a friend once who was a book-

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keeper," volunteered the Pedagogue, "—he kept all my best editions."

"Speaking of 'best sellers,' it seems to me as a lawyer that books sell in inverse proportion to the value of their contents," spoke up a little, quiet, bearded man, drawing hard on his pipe. "The worst of it is that no man can decide as to who is the greatest sinner: the one who wrote the book, the publisher, or the man who was Chamberized."

"But isn't it possible that even the 'best sellers' have a function aside from profiting the producers?" queried the Doctor, as he assembled eighteen holes of Swiss cheese into a sandwich. "There is the baby's pacifier, for instance, a little thing as greatly reprobated by physicians as it is highly esteemed by mothers. The maternal theory is that the deception is innocent and keeps the child from crying. Now, crying, in moderation, expands the lungs, develops the chest, and improves the circulation, however disturbing it may be to the peace of mind of the family. So the 'best seller' acts as a pacifier and saves the reader from irksome mental activity, soothes his feebly struggling conscience, and enables him to get appreciably nearer to death without actual use of his head."

"That may be true," added the Poet; "but there is yet another phase. People

do not seek facts, nor want them; they seek illusions. Every happy person is chasing a phantom which, like Æneas' wife, continually eludes him. The happiest man is he who thinks he has his illusion secured. It feeds his self-esteem. So people want dreams and visions, emotions, and thrills. This need is supplied to a degree by the 'best seller' wherein, for a short time, each reader sees a representation of his own idea that in some miraculous way life is going to change. It may be drunkenness, an emotional debauch, perhaps, which has, of late especially, a Paphian tinge, but it satisfies the craving less injuriously than drugs."

"To hear the Poet extenuating the 'best sellers' gives me a shock," declared the Critic. "There may be reason in his argument, probably there is; but, like George Moore, nothing irritates me so much as other people's illusions."

"Truth only smells sweet forever," quoted the Pedagogue, "and illusions, however innocent, are deadly as the canker worm."

"One can hardly blame the public for liking the easy reading of the 'best seller,' explained the Librarian, "for unless a man has practiced playing three or four games of chess simultaneously, he is not mentally equipped to read the modern newspaper and magazine. Each column starts a new sub-

ject and all conclusions must be avoided and the mind kept in suspense until the continuation is found on the lower half of the third column, or the middle third of the sixth column of some succeeding page, and usually buried among a mass of advertisements."

"Elizabeth had her dramatists, and Queen Anne her essayists," rolled the Historian, "but our own age is distinguished by the flood of futile fiction which flows through the broad and shallow channels of literature. May the Lord have pity on the future Macaulay, who gets his knowledge of the social characteristics of our day, not from a single Petronius Arbiter, not from a Decameron or a Gil Blas, but from the myriad of more or less contradictory 'documents' that emanate from our tireless presses!"

"They will never be useful as 'documents,'" said the Pedagogue; "the paper won't last. In books of assumed permanent value, like McMaster's History, the first volume is *foxed* before the last one appears."

"Alas, my poor little spruce trees," muttered the Critic; "how remorselessly they have been sacrificed, and how uselessly."

"Yes," said the Lawyer; "there is no illusion there—they fall in Hecatombs to make a Roman holiday. I suppose the

common idea of success is based on devastation rather than construction, because it is more dramatic."

"Success in literature depends entirely on the success of the illusion," commented the Librarian. "This is the crutch that supports the yellow press. A trivial illusion or a sordid appeal will always attract the masses. People won't read things that do not interest them. The 'best sellers' are not literature—no—but what is literature, or, to bring it down to something concrete and tangible, what is poetry? Does any one know—is it entirely the personal equation? Now, I believe that Byron, next to Shakespeare, is the greatest English poet, and when my friend the Critic looks at me with a cold, scientific eye, and asks me why, I can only reply that he is so for me. Now, our own poet is enamored of Masfield—says he is the greatest exponent of a new form of the art; but again comes the Critic and claims that poetry without the use of the beautiful words which have made English poetry pre-eminent in the expression of ideas of beauty—this, he says, is a contradiction in terms—so there you are."

"I must admit the impeachment," nodded the Critic; "Masfield is strong, yes, and dramatic, truly, but somehow the use of a vulgar dialect—bad enough in prose

—is always unpleasant and irritating in poetry; like spots on a beautiful face.”

“Then you don’t care for Burns?” argued the Poet.

“Well, of course, that’s different,” acknowledged the Critic; “for there the words have a mellow broadness which is nearly always musical, while the New England and western changes are usually on the side of roughness and clumsiness. Yet Lowell steeped the New England dialect in an odor of poetry it never before exhaled, and never may again. It seems to me that most of the objection lies in the eye reaction, yet a part certainly affects the ear. Take Root, for instance. His auditory nerve has been so finely sensitized and so highly cultivated that he almost has a death-sweat when we westerners use the broad terminal *R*. I suppose I react somewhat similarly to dialect poetry. Yes, Lowell certainly achieved a triumph in New England vernacular.”

“Your damnation of Masefield is not all-embracing and final, is it?” asked the Poet.

“Of course I do not include all his shorter verse. There is *Cargoes*, for instance, in which lines like these occur:

‘Stately Spanish galleon coming from the Isthmus,
Dipping through the Tropics by the palm-green
shores,
With a cargo of diamonds,
Emeralds, amethysts,
Topazes, cinnamon and gold moidores.’

“Nothing statelier or more poetic could be found in the language, but ‘The Everlasting Mercy,’ ‘The Widow in Bye Street,’ and the like—no they are not poetry for me. Masfield paints a gray land full of sordid shadows; a sunless place devoid of conscious, joyous life. Even fortunate Love is sad and Hope is unknown. Let us take the last verse of the same poem:

‘Dirty British coaster with salt-caked smokestack,
Butting through the channel on the mad March days,
With a cargo of tyne coal,
Road-rails, pig-lead,
Firewood, ironware, and cheap tin trays.’

“In my opinion that illustrates what Masfield has done for English poetry—he has brought peacocks and amethysts and gold molders down to the level of cheap tin trays.”

“O well,” laughed the Poet; “we can’t agree, and I want to congratulate the Critic on his election to the presidency of the Club.”

“It was as gratifying as it was unexpected,” murmured the Critic, “but such an office, while it brings much honor, has also its responsibilities. This Club, I believe, contains and emanates the literary and cultural essence of the Middle West; an essence suggests ointment, and you can’t think of ointment without flies, can you?”

“No, there is always a fly in the ointment,

and it is a good thing, too," interjected the Judge, hitching up his chair. "In this Club, for instance, all are artists, but some are active and some passive—the latter might be regarded as flies in the ointment, but they too have the artistic temperament, the tastes, the delights, the instincts of the race—everything except that creative gadfly which stings to expression. They are quite as necessary to the world as the active artists since they are the first to recognize the good points of the latter and to strengthen them with warm, intelligent sympathy. So the fly stirs up the ointment by his struggles and soon becomes an integral part of it. The difference disappears; no one knows which is fly and which is ointment."

"Speaking of flies," grinned the Historian, as he filled his pipe, "I have often wondered what authors talked about. For years I supposed Paul Shorey never spoke except to discuss some abstruse problem in philosophy. Then Ferrero came and I stole into a Boswellian position, where I could educate myself through the occasional driplets which signalize his overflow of soul."

"What happened?"

"Well, nothing the first hour; then the Delphic lips opened with the words: Rome had her vandals—America has pie."

"As to Paul Shorey," interrupted the

Pedagogue, "it is only possible for a tongue to acquire such extraordinary facility, not to say prehensibility, through inveterate practice in munching Greek roots."

"When I was honored with the presidency," said the Lawyer, "I found no fly. It was all ointment, and simon pure. But what is your particular fly?"

"What could easily be all ointment for you becomes largely a matter of flies to me—all kinds of flies, but especially the biting kind. You see it is that inaugural address. It worries me. I feel inadequate to do it worthily for the Club, and I wish some of you would suggest a principle, a subject, or some method of treating a subject, that would be satisfactory."

"Whatever you do make it light," cautioned the Doctor. "Make it pathetic, if you please; make it humorous or tender; expand it with fiction or inflate it with fancy, but above all things, make it light."

"Why worry about anything so trivial," interposed the silver-tongued Librarian, filling his glass. "It seems easy enough to me. It might not be to-morrow or yesterday, but to-night it does. Still it would be foolish to help you—you need the exercise."

"It wouldn't hurt you any to throw me a rope, a kind of literary life line," begged the Critic.

"O well, just to show you, then, I will start it for you. Give me some paper, and then procul — procul — or at least keep still." His pencil scratched the pad with a speed that seemed almost indecent.

Meanwhile two gentlemen exchanged significant glances, rose from the table, and faded away. The Critic glanced at his time-piece and looked after them sadly. It was nine o'clock; their Evanstonian veneer of respectability had been so badly cracked by late hours at the Club that they resembled old-fashioned mahogany tables.

"They can hear that Evanstonian curfew anywhere they happen to be," remarked the Historian. "It is only a question of time when they will start home so early that they will run the risk of being crushed beneath the arriving heels of the ever belated Block.

"Again speaking of flies," iterated the Critic, "I have had an enormous, practical experience with them. In a way, they are useful. They drive people to golf, tennis and croquet, who might otherwise invade and spoil the woods. So the 'best seller' possibly engages the interest of many who might muss up good literature. Nevertheless, no one is really justified in reading a best seller until he has read Fabre's work on flies — The Librarian has stopped writing — let's listen."

“Here goes your address, Mr. Critic — see how you like it.”

“Gentlemen of the Literary Club:

“From time to time the world cries out against some charming artistic poet because, to use the hackneyed and silly phrase, ‘he has nothing to say.’ But if he had something to say he would probably say it and the result would be tedious. It is just because he has no new message that he can do beautiful work. A real passion would ruin him. Whatever actually occurs is spoiled for art. All bad poetry springs from genuine feeling. To be natural is to be obvious, and to be obvious is to be inartistic.

“The subject matter at the disposal of creation becomes every day more limited in extent and variety. Mr. Bennett and Samuel Butler have already exhausted the obvious.

“Those whom the poets make live, have their myriad emotions of joy and terror, of courage and despair, of pleasure and suffering. The seasons come and go in glad or saddening pageant, and with winged or leaden feet the years pass before them. It is always dawn for St. Helena as Veronese saw her at the window. Through the still morning air the angels bring her the symbol of God’s pain. The cool breezes of the morning lift the gilt threads from her brow.

On that little hill by the city of Florence, where the Lovers of Giorgione are lying, it is always the solstice of noon—of noon made so languorous by summer suns that hardly can the slim, naked girl dip into the marble tank the bubble of glass and the long fingers of the lute player rest idly upon the chords. It is twilight always for the dancing nymphs whom Corot set free among the silver poplars of France.

“In eternal twilight they move, those frail diaphanous figures whose tremulous white feet seem not to touch the dew-drenched grass they brush.

“But those who walk in epoc, drama, or romance see through the laboring months the young moon wax and wane, and from sunrise unto sunsetting can note the shifting day with all its gold and shadow.

“The statue is concentrated to one moment of perfection. The image stained upon the canvas possesses no spiritual element of growth or change.

“Movement—that problem of the visible arts—can be truly realized by literature alone. It is literature that shows us the body in its swiftness and the soul in its unrest.

“Thus, gentlemen of the Literary Club—”

“That’s enough of Oscar Wilde,” interrupted the Pedagogue; “do you bring him forward as a model for us?”

"Why not? There is nothing more brilliant as literature, and certainly he was a master of form."

"You don't call that Wilde, do you?" flouted the Historian. "It doesn't sound right to me."

"I suspected somebody might say that, so I stole a lot of it from the volume I happen to have along," replied the Librarian; "but in fact he is quite fresh in my mind at this time. Personally, I don't care for him, but would you exclude him from the Club?"

"Not exclude, no, though it would not be the first time," returned the Historian. "But why use him as a model? His flight was never seriously sustained."

"No," said the Critic, "nor was it ever sustained seriously; he was too bright to plod. You see, his product was not the result of a pure toxin; he had a mixed infection."

"Hobby, hobby, get off your horse!" cried the insulting chorus, while a member from Winnetka moved off to get the 9:30 train.

"That is always the way," murmured the Doctor; "we just begin to light up here when the *stars* go out. His ancestral halls must have been illumined by rush lights, he goes out so easily in this incarnation."

"Astronomers tell us every star 'goes

dark' in a certain number of years," quibbled the Lawyer. "I suppose the supply of radium is exhausted, radium being equivalent among stars to the Critic's theory of toxins."

"There are other theories just as interesting," announced the Critic. "For instance, we most frequently attribute the first manifestations of a vocation or artistic aptitude, even genius, to moral emotions suddenly aroused. But is it quite true? May we not have a physical basis for these manifestations—a peculiar metamorphosis of the molecules? Take the case of St. Paul, with his sunstroke, or Amiel, whose literary productiveness was the result of a fright; take Pascale's accident at the Neuilly Bridge, or Clement V, who always maintained that his marvelous memory was due to a blow on the head. There are numerous supports for the argument. Some day it will be all worked out, but to me it seems probable that the illness or injury broke the shell of educational environment, or the imposed custom, and permitted a strong subliminal impulse to come through and dominate life."

"The injury is just as likely to have a contrary effect as well," concurred the Doctor. "If the subject was not too heavy for a warm evening, I would inquire why Kipling has been sterile ever since his attack

of typhoid fever—but, speaking of interesting theories, why don't some of you get up a thesis on the topic suggested by George Moore, as to whether the best literature is the product of gratified or ungratified passion."

"It is a question that allows too much latitude in treatment," answered the Poet. "The personal equation is a great factor, and even George Moore did not escape the charge that he maintained the affirmative in self defense."

"Besides," contributed the Historian, "it is as hard to get evidence as it would be to limit an enquiry to the effect of starvation on art and literature. It is generally true that the best work has been done during the starvation period, but whether this is *propter hoc* or otherwise, is solely a matter of conjecture."

"Stevenson said the predestined writer needed only pencil, paper, and a kitchen table," obtruded the Critic.

"Yes, but that controverts the starvation theory, since a kitchen table connotes a full larder."

"Wilde never starved, and George Moore never could convict Yeats of conformity to his theory, try as he would," offered the Historian.

"If Moore's position was generally accepted, wouldn't it create a condition con-

trary to public policy and morals?" inquired the Lawyer. "What do you think, Doctor?"

"Nobody would notice the social difference, and ambitious literary moths would perish in the flames they evoked."

"Then Moore's theory is probably untenable," muttered the Pedagogue, sorrowfully.

"Any one can put a burr under the tail of Pegasus," ventured the Poet, "but the result of a flight so provoked is not necessarily literature. It may be anything, from clean, fluent prose to imagism, or Gertrude Stein down to newspaper English. At this point one becomes helpless, for to carp and rail against newspaper English and the flat prose of the magazines is to convict oneself at once of the 'holier than thou' attitude—the only unforgivable sin in the American calendar."

"Speaking of Moore," observed the Librarian, screwing his eyes apprehensively, "wouldn't it be well to characterize his theory as progress in literature by the pollywog method?"

"Or the Pollywog Path to Parnassus," corrected the Pedagogue.

"You are consecrated to folly to-night," urged the Critic, querulously; "I don't see what all this has to do with my problem; I can't write like Oscar Wilde."

“Nobody wants you to,” laughed the Librarian, “but see what a hit you would make if you did.”

“At all events, you can’t deny the spark of genius to a man whose work has the style and atmosphere of Wilde’s. By the way, is it nobler in the mind to be brilliant and interesting or stupid, diffuse, and honest?” asked the Poet. “Answer me that.”

“Everything that flieth, and everything that creepeth, let him answer after his kind,” said the Pedagogue, “for no other answer shall ye gain.”

“Whatever Wilde may have been,” declared the Critic, “his muse was a mild but natural Pythia and inherited many of her convulsions. We should have to eat all sorts of insane roots to imitate him.”

“Why not try Johnson then,” asked the Judge; “he ought to be the deity to whom this Club especially should pray—besides, all literary men are of necessity Shintoists and worship their ancestors. If my intellectual joints had not become too warm and elastic in the effort to follow these empty acrobatic exercises to-night, I might show you what I mean. Maybe the Historian would do it.”

“I can picture Johnson monologing to the Literary Club, all right,” responded the Historian; “but making a formal address before it—no—the Club was small and

Johnson large, not to say ponderous. Why not try Holmes? He is the model for talks to literary circles."

"Let the Doctor do it; he is a devout disciple and Holmes is an American, too."

"Why should that make any difference?" reasoned the Librarian. "There should be no more provincialism in literature than in science or in other arts. Give the Doctor the paper and let him start."

At this point two university men gave one another the stare esoteric and pushed back their chairs.

"It must be ten minutes to ten," said the Lawyer, as his eyes followed them out. "They usually spread their wings at that time and go south."

"It's an inauspicious, not to say untimely, migration," chuckled the Judge, "which takes them from the cheery atmosphere of the Club to the dismal, smoke-begrimed obscurities of Anthracite Alley." In the words of Shakespeare—with variations:

'Then as some most gracious pastors do,
They leave to us the fertile fields and meads,
While they themselves laboriously do tread
The dark and dusty cinder path,
And reckon not their good.'

"Shakespeare's method of expression will live because of the universality of his ideas," declared the Librarian, "but Johnson's style is hard for us. He and Gibbon

were peculiar to their time, a time that can never recur. Besides, prose, even among the best stylists, is much more difficult to imitate successfully than verse."

"Then why not use blank verse altogether," chimed in the Judge. "Shaw says it is so childishly simple that no one—even Shakespeare—ever uses it except when he is in too great a hurry to write prose. Take any prolific and voluminous writer—like Dickens—and most of his output can be divided into perfect blank verse. I suppose the Poet here could give us an imitation of any of the marked poetic styles easily and quickly."

"In tone and manner, possibly, yes," assented the Poet; "in substance, no. One can get dialect, movement, and atmosphere readily enough, but not the inside works. The Doctor is waiting; give me the pad and I will see what I can do while he reads."

"I am not so awfully certain about this," apologized the Doctor, "but it was an interesting stunt to try. Here it is:

"Gentlemen of the Literary Club:

"There are three occasions upon which a human being has a right to consider himself as a center of interest to those about him: when he is christened, when he is married, and when he is buried. Every one is the chief personage, the hero of his

own baptism, his own wedding, and his own funeral.

“There are other occasions—less momentous, to be sure—in which one may make more of himself than under ordinary circumstances he would think proper to do—when he can indulge in more or less egoistic monolog without fear of reproach.

“I think this is one of those occasions. We have met in a spirit of joy which I trust I may not spoil for you by my remarks. A new essay always has a certain excitement connected with its delivery. One thinks well of it, as of most things fresh from his mind, and one tries it with pleasure, like a new tool. The only question, the final question, indeed, is its reception by the audience. Now, this Club is a specialized audience; such a one as the papers refer to as a *remarkably intelligent audience*; and the matter of intellectual pabulum assumes a much higher importance.

“We long now for some natural method of feeding such a gathering—at once easy and certain. A pair of substantial mammary glands, not too fat, has a great advantage over the two hemispheres of the most learned professor’s brain in the art of compounding a nutritious fluid for infants. So for this Club a natural method must be selected that will infuse the audience with a high quality of caloric, and yet leave each

individual with a sense of pleasure and complacency without satiety."

"Bravo, bravo!" cried the chorus.

"Well done, indeed," commented the Lawyer. "Holmes was the only poet who could write good 'occasionals' without at the same time losing faith in the finer inspiration or ceasing to obey it."

"Hood had the same quality, didn't he?" inquired the Pedagogue.

"Yes," responded the Lawyer, "but he didn't often show it. This is an age of problems and I am tired of reading books that convey a lesson, inculcate a truth, or appeal to the moral sense. It is like turning the glorious guild of authors into a tract society, and then raising their output to the *nth* power. Authors revolt at it as well as the populace. William Watson puts it beautifully. 'Theology,' he says, 'lies somewhat outside my province, and I feel that I can safely leave the subject to Mrs. Humphrey Ward, who employs it so pleasantly to soften the austerities of fiction.' I wish we had more of Holmes' naive, playful element in our literature. It is a pure delight without a sequence either of headache or morbid tears."

"His literary fame has largely obscured his rare excellence as physician," added the Doctor, "and it must have been a difficult position."

"No man," meditated the Historian, "even the greatest, can breathe a certain atmosphere all his life without taking some of its ingredients into his blood; and just those which seem best may be most fatal to the imaginative faculty. I have always thought there was more friction and conflict in Holmes' intellectual life than many of us think."

"Yes, but it kept him young," protested the Critic. "Every man must have relief from the grind of his daily occupation. Look at this Club. I venture to say that every man in it, who has attended the meetings sedulously, has prolonged his life by ten years. Be material by day, if you please, but at night devote yourself to the arts. Do you remember Stevenson's meeting with the Canoe Club at Brussels—'The Royal Sport Nautique'? 'We are employed in commerce during the day,' said they, 'but in the evening *voyez vous, nous sommes sérieux.*' These were their words. They were employed over the frivolous mercantile concerns of Belgium during the day, but in the evening they found some hours for the serious concerns of life. 'I may have a wrong idea of wisdom,' comments Stevenson, 'but I think that was a very wise remark.' Here in this Club we busy ourselves with various material interests by day, and once each week a night is consecrated to the

worship of culture and literature. It seems to me that this Club bears constant testimony to the breadth of vision and depth of feeling which animated the builders of the city. To them, commerce and culture went hand in hand. In this day the function of the Club is even more important in its guardianship of pure literature. The tastes of the public seem to have reached a relationship to literary excellence like that of the gardener to the frog. 'I'll larn ye to be a frog!' said the gardener as he applied the hoe of extermination. In this Club we can burn incense to the old gods fearless of contagion from the imagist school of poetry, the ster-
coraceous school of fiction, and the porno-graphic school of drama. However, the Poet seems to have stopped writing. Let us hear him."

"I am possessed of the true spirit!" cried the Poet. "Listen now to a bit of heroic verse, which illustrates my theory that meter and manner can be imitated easily. We will call it The Dentiad:

"Whene'er along the ivory tusks are seen
The tristful traces of the dark gangrene,
When Caries comes, with stealthy pace to throw
Corrosive inkspots on those banks of snow,
Brook no delay, ye trembling, suffering fair,
But fly for refuge to the dentist's care;
His practiced hand, obedient to his will,
Employs the slender gouge with nicest skill;
Just sweeps the vermin of disease away,
And stops the fearful progress of decay."

“Help! help!”

“That’s enough — put him out!” shouted the chorus.

“Let somebody extract him,” urged the Pedagogue.

“If the Poet wants to risk his reputation by finishing it,” laughed the Judge, “I am confident it would become a ‘best seller,’ or, if he would make it as long as one of Payne’s cigars, it would be epical if not epochal.”

In the noise of the general conversation two men tiptoed from the table and took the cinder path which leads to domesticity and duress.

“Speaking of flies,” mumbled the Doctor, “it must be ten forty-five. Let’s get another drop of toxin from the domain of spirits—the rappings will come to a head to-morrow.”

“It is curious,” mused the Librarian, “how even nonsense lines cannot deprive the classic verse entirely of its stateliness. You might as well undertake an architectural burlesque of the Parthenon. It is the Gothic, Byzantine, and Moresque styles in literature which give the true material for travesty.”

“Just as they allow the greatest intellectual freedom,” reflected the Critic. “One can close one’s ears to the sense of classic verse and get an impression almost as strong

from the rolling music of the lines. A marked rhythm or a peculiar meter is usually easy to parody, while the nonsense of the ideas enforces the contrast. Dialect verse is probably the hardest to write and the easiest to imitate. At least it ought to be, and while I would not insult the great volume of really meritorious dialect verse by classing it with the pornographic school of drama, which is now so popular, yet they have one point in common. They do not appeal to the imagination. The drama, because it leaves nothing for the imagination to work upon, and dialect verse because the flight of the mind is constantly hindered by the medium."

"I am something of a purist myself," drawled the Pedagogue, "but I don't carry it to a romantic extreme; so I think I shall take the cinder path."

"You are likely to miss a good thing," the Doctor called after him, "for the Poet is swelling visibly."

"Purists and Pedagogues represent the facts of life," asserted the Lawyer. "They go about with clumsy feet and trample the train of fair Romance or pluck the cloak from her dainty shoulders."

"I don't think the medium makes such a difference," smiled the Poet, "provided the ear catches the music which lurks behind metrical correctness. You take any

poem, dialect or otherwise, which is sweetly and smoothly finished, and it appeals to the imagination if the idea is there."

"That may be true," rejoined the Critic, "but the true artist is one who recognizes the beauty of the material he employs, be that material words, bronze, or color, and who uses that material to enhance the æsthetic effect. Hence, if the medium is impure, can it possibly offer the seductiveness that we find in modern poetry when the richness and variety of metrical effect and the refinement of form has been carefully worked out?"

"Meaning whom, for instance?" asked the Poet.

"Well, compare Lanier, Aldrich, or Gilder, with Riley."

"The comparison is unfair," countered the Poet, "because of the difference in intellect and culture. Why not Lowell in place of Riley?"

"The greater the intellect and the greater the culture," insisted the Critic, "the more probable will the form be pure unless used in a lighter moment, or to convey a sense of character. Lowell wanted to emphasize his type and even then he wrote under a *nom de plume*."

"Be careful now," pleaded the Librarian, "or you will start a literary movement. Remember *Ae's* definition. He says: 'A

literary movement consists of five or six people, who live in the same town, and hate each other cordially.'"

"We shall hardly get serious enough for that, I fear," beamed the Judge, as he pushed his chair back and rose. A general exodus followed, an exodus which the Critic strove in vain to check.

"You have no right to go yet," he urged. "I can't see that you have helped much with my address. Why don't you stand by and give me a suggestion? Carry your interest farther. Stimulate your imagination as if you had a personal responsibility; the failure will recoil on your own heads, I warn you. Wilde I cannot be, nor Holmes, nor Swift, nor yet a reincarnation of old Virgil. No powerful creative toxin is at hand. I am indeed lost."

"Nevertheless," he philosophized, "we have had our usual delightful evening at the Club, and if I fail to give an adequate address, the reproduction of our conversation may possibly convey an impression of what the Club has meant to some of us, and may mean for all. In one respect, at all events, it conforms to the prescription laid down by the Doctor. It may not be harmonious nor even consecutive. It may not be beautiful like the sea-born Venus, but surely it will be as light as the foam from which she sprung."

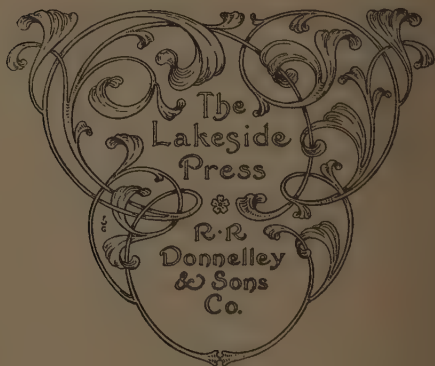
Thus spake the Critic, stirring his coffee, and he raised his eyes to find that Mrs. Green was his only auditor, for the Poet's coat-tails cracked like a whip as he rounded through the doorway in pursuit of the 11.30 train.

"Mrs. Green, what is your opinion of flies in the ointment," asked the Critic.

"I always thought it served 'em right for butting in," observed that discreet lady.



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